

Mom, Pop by MelindaCoulson4

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Characters: Bob Newby, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Mike Wheeler, Sam Owens (Stranger Things), Will Byers

Relationships: Jim "Chief" Hopper & Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

Set during 2x06 in the lab. Hopper pov.

Tempers run high. A misunderstanding arises. Could potentially fit into canon. Jopper-centric.

Mom, Pop

Author's Note:

Of course I had to write something about the "Mom.....Pop" quote. Also the Hopper & Owens dynamic interests me

"Alright let's get going," Owens said with a wave of his hands, signaling everyone to file out of the room.

They had just finished formulating a plan to check out the spot in the tunnels that Will had pointed out. A team of ten men would go to the open area with cameras strapped to their gear and stream video back to the control center, hoping that they'd spot something significant.

It was nothing more than a recon mission. Hopper couldn't help but feel like they were grasping at straws, but there weren't any other options. And Owens, much like himself, wasn't one to sit around twiddling his thumbs, waiting for something to happen. They had their differences, but he had to give Owens credit for at least trying to figure this all out.

Hopper stood towards the back, letting Joyce and Will walk in front of him. She had an arm wrapped around Will's small lanky frame, keeping him pressed against her side. Bob was on the other side of Will, eyebrows pinched together with worry, seemingly lost in thought.

The scientists around them mumbled softly between one another. He'd seen the skeptical looks they shot each other during the meeting when Will talked about the shadow monster. Clearly some of them didn't believe what Will was saying and didn't agree to this mission.

One in particular verbalized his apprehension somewhere behind Hopper.

"This is absolutely ridiculous." The comment floated around the room. Everyone could clearly hear what was said.

Hopper tried his best to ignore it, but the comment made his blood boil. Will was already scared out of his mind. The last thing he needed was to hear a snide remark from some skeptical scientist who had no idea what he was talking about. None of them knew, but complaining about it wouldn't help the situation. Will was trying his best. That's all they could hope for.

The tense feeling in the muscles of his shoulders slowly eased, but it wasn't enough. He still felt ready for a fight. A throbbing ache in his right temple had been bothering him for hours now. Breathing became difficult at random intervals. Especially when he started remembering how the debris floating in the tunnels had went into his mouth and lungs. That combined with the inflamed skin all over his body from the high-powered industrial grade hose made him constantly uncomfortable. The lack of sleep did nothing to help his budding frustration. He felt keyed up almost as if he'd been waiting for an excuse to unleash everything and this seemed to be the perfect opportunity.

Dark, frightened eyes in front of him drew his attention. Seeing that look on Mike's face deflated him instantly.

The kid was watching him intently like he wanted to speak up but was unsure.

Instead of pummeling the random obnoxious scientist, Hopper focused back on Mike. "Kid. You okay?"

He was quiet and difficult to read. Within the past year he'd seen a lot of Mike Wheeler. His interaction with law enforcement increased from zero to several times a month. The list of his transgressions included egging houses, spraying graffiti in the middle school bathroom, and getting into verbal and a few physical altercations with classmates. It baffled teachers, Karen, Ted, and the crew at the station. They could not come up with a reason why the formerly respectful, straight A student with no behavioral problems had suddenly turned into a troublemaker.

Hopper knew the cause: El.

Thinking of her only served as a reminder of his recent failures.

Jesus, he had no idea what was going on with her. He could only hope that she was okay in the cabin. Just another sign of proof that he was a shitty excuse for a father.

"Yea...I guess," Mike finally said with a noncommittal shrug.

His posture told a different story. The kid looked like he was being physically weighed down. On top of all of the normal teenage worries he had this burden. The burden of *knowing*.

Each person who knew the truth had experienced major ramifications in their life. It was too much for the kids to deal with. *Hell*, it was too much for him to deal with as an adult.

"He's probably just crazy....like the mom." The same voice piped up again - a man.

Joyce turned her head and glanced behind Hopper, clearly she'd heard the comment. For a brief moment she paused and her dark eyes flickered towards his own. She quickly turned back around and continued down the hallway. The move surprised him. Usually she'd be the first one to unleash on someone before she could think it through. It was that fierce protective streak that he found so endearing.

But that one look was enough for Hopper. He'd read the exhaustion, pain, and embarrassment all over her face. It sent him hurtling over the edge.

He abruptly turned around to see which son of a bitch in a lab coat thought it was a bright idea to talk about a sick kid and his worried mother.

When he saw that it was the same jackass that protested earlier as Will studied the pictures on the conference table his vision went red.

Joyce didn't need this, didn't deserve it either. His jaw locked up and his breathing came out in short puffs. The pounding in his head increased in full force.

Unable to hold himself back, he charged forward.

"What'd you say?" He growled, challenging the scientist to repeat his snide remarks. He was interested to see how loose the jackass's tongue would be now.

In a blink, the scientists separated into two groups, parting like the sea with one lone soul left in the middle. The blue name tag clipped to the man's jacket collar read *R, Phillips*.

"Uh.....Uh....." The man stumbled, almost shriveling up in fear. All the confidence that he seemed to have had before now vanished.

Hopper towered over him, wanting to snatch up the man's tie in a tight fist. Maybe cutting off his circulation would help him see why it wasn't a good idea to talk about traumatized kids.

Before he could make contact with Phillips someone reached out and intercepted his arm. A large, gentle hand landed on Hopper's forearm.

"Jim," Bob warned, sensing that things were going sideways.

Somehow the act made Hopper's anger spike. Here was Bob the calm peacekeeper, stepping in front of hothead Hopper. Everyone's *buddy* Bob was here to save the day.

The anger was overwhelming him. He wanted nothing more than to rip his arm away from Bob. But the kids were now staring, waiting to see how he would react. Deep down he knew the truth behind all of this. That his jealous feelings were coming out. And that if Bob wasn't careful everything that Hopper had been compartmentalizing for the last six months would soon be channeled towards him.

"Let's all take a breath," Owens intervened, taking back control before things got out of hand. Perhaps he could sense the boiling emotions in the hall.

Owens turned his attention to Phillips. "If you don't have anything productive to contribute don't bother speaking up." The deliverance was stern and clearly meant as a reprimand.

"Come on, Cheif-o." Owens patted Hopper's back, encouraging him to keep moving down the hall.

Earlier, when they were planning, it was decided that Bob, Mike, and Joyce would stay with Will. They could all try to catch up on some rest in one of the exam rooms, while the rest of the plan played out. Really what other choice did they have? There was nothing for any of them to do anyway.

However, Hopper knew that resting was out of the question for Joyce. She'd fidget and worry herself into a frenzy over Will, even more so than she already had. As long as he was connected to that shadow monster thing they all had reason to be alarmed.

Hopper watched from his position in the hall as the group of them shuffled into the designated exam room. Joyce hesitated and turned, locking eyes with him as if she was calling out to him. It broke something inside of him. She looked so tiny and lost. All he wanted to do was wrap her in his arms and hold her. But he knew that was just a fantasy. He couldn't do any of that. He couldn't help but feel like an intruder around her now because of Bob. The romantic relationship between Joyce and Bob had by extension completely changed Hopper's relationship with Joyce. Every interaction was laced with underlying tension and a sense of discomfort.

He felt suffocated around them as a couple, which is why he had volunteered to be an extra set of eyes in the control room. Anything to get away from them.

Someone called for Joyce's attention and she was gone from his view a second later.

Breathing became easier with every step he took down the hallway - further away from her. The distance would do them some good.

Owens led them to an elevator where he tapped the down button. When it arrived, a handful of people in lab coats were already inside it. They stayed silent as people filed out one by one at various stops. This continued until they were the only ones inside the elevator as the doors slid closed on the tenth level.

Hopper's back collided roughly with the metal wall as he collapsed into the corner finally free from prying eyes.

"I'm.....well - sorry doesn't begin to cover it. We're doing all we can to figure out how to separate Will from....all the rest of it," Owens said.

"Yea. Yea I got that." Hopper pinched his nose, trying to ease the ache in his head.

"I know it's a highly stressful situation. I can't begin to understand how you two must be feeling," Owens said.

He kept his eyes closed. It took him a minute to figure out what Owens meant. 'You two' as in he and Joyce - 'mom and pop'. Each time they came in for Will's checkups Owens greeted them as mom and pop. The first time Owens said it Hopper's eyes had snapped over to Joyce. She didn't say anything or appear to be uncomfortable. Nor did she correct Owens, so neither did he. It was as if it was a normal, everyday thing.

He had a growing suspicion that Owens actually thought Will was his son. For some odd reason he felt compelled to come clean now.

"I'm not his father," Hopper blurted out, attempting to clarify any misunderstandings.

A long pause settled around them. Long enough that he began to believe that Owens hadn't heard him.

"Will isn't yours?" Utter confusion spread across Owens' features.

Hopper was genuinely taken aback for a few seconds. "No," he finally answered, unable to meet Owens' eyes.

"I always just assumed. He's Bob's then?"

"What? *Jesus* - no. *No*," Hopper denied. The thought of Bob and Joyce having a kid....*Christ*. No way. Thinking of Bob and Joyce joined as a family made it harder for Hopper to keep breathing.

Owens still did not seem to understand. His brows were pinched so close together that it looked like he was stuck trying to solve some scientific conundrum.

Again, Hopper felt a deep need to explain the situation. "Will's dad is

not around. Hasn't been for a while." That's the nicest way he could describe anything having to do with Lonnie.

Owens shook his head. "Then what exactly is Bob doing here?"

"He's - he and Joyce are dating." The words felt unnatural leaving his mouth. When he was with Joyce he'd generally be able to forget all about Bob's position in her life. The amount of times they had all been together in one place before today could be counted on one hand.

"I have to say, Chief....I'm real confused here," Owens said.

The questioning was starting to grate on his nerves now. He really didn't have the patience for this anymore. "About what?"

The elevator dinged, signaling their arrival on the sub-basement level. They began walking towards the control room with Owens leading the way.

"The dynamics - You and Joyce. I thought you two were *together*."

That caused a painful twisting in his gut. It was like a reminder that he wasn't good enough for her. "No - uh no. Just friends," he said pathetically. It was his own fault. He let her go time and time again because he knew she deserved someone better. She was on a whole different level than someone like him.

"It's just that....you've always seemed more. Especially with all of *that* earlier." Owens waved his hand through the air as if signaling something specific.

"All of what?" Hopper asked, confusion clouding his features.

"Earlier when we were talking in the hall - the eyes and the hands between you two," Owen referenced.

All at once Hopper felt like he was being accused of something. He remembered how it went down. There were tears shining under her eyes as she expressed her fears about completely losing Will to the shadow monster. On instinct his arm wrapped around her body. She'd turned to him upset and he'd felt the need to help comfort her.

And she'd never protested or told him he'd overstepped. He'd never really given it a second thought. But now he felt the need to analyze it all. It was kind of odd. How she continued to hold Bob at arm's length. Even though he'd seen a whole lot of shit by now. Just setting foot in this lab was a big leap in the trust department.

Truthfully he knew what it was really about. It was self-preservation. She didn't want to spook Bob. The thing about Joyce was that she had a tendency to think that once people knew her, really knew everything - the whole truth - they'd take off running.

For him, it was the exact opposite. Knowing everything made him want to move towards her. Just thinking about it all caused his cheeks to flame up in embarrassment.

"And I'm not just talking about on your end, Chief-o. Her too."

Owens was implying that there was something more between them. That maybe Joyce wanted him too. Those were dangerous thoughts to entertain.

Nothing but foolish daydreaming that would only serve to burn him in the end.

There wasn't anything more than friendship between them. She'd made that clear when she started dating Bob and didn't even tell him about it. And honestly, he wasn't really in the mood to ponder this right now.

"It doesn't matter," he dismissed. The reality was that she's with Bob and that's how it was going to stay. "Can we stop playing twenty questions teenage girl addition and focus on what we're here to do?"

"Okay. Okay sorry," Owens said, realizing that he'd struck a sensitive issue.

They didn't speak about the matter again.

//End//

Author's Note:

All comments welcome, thanks for reading!